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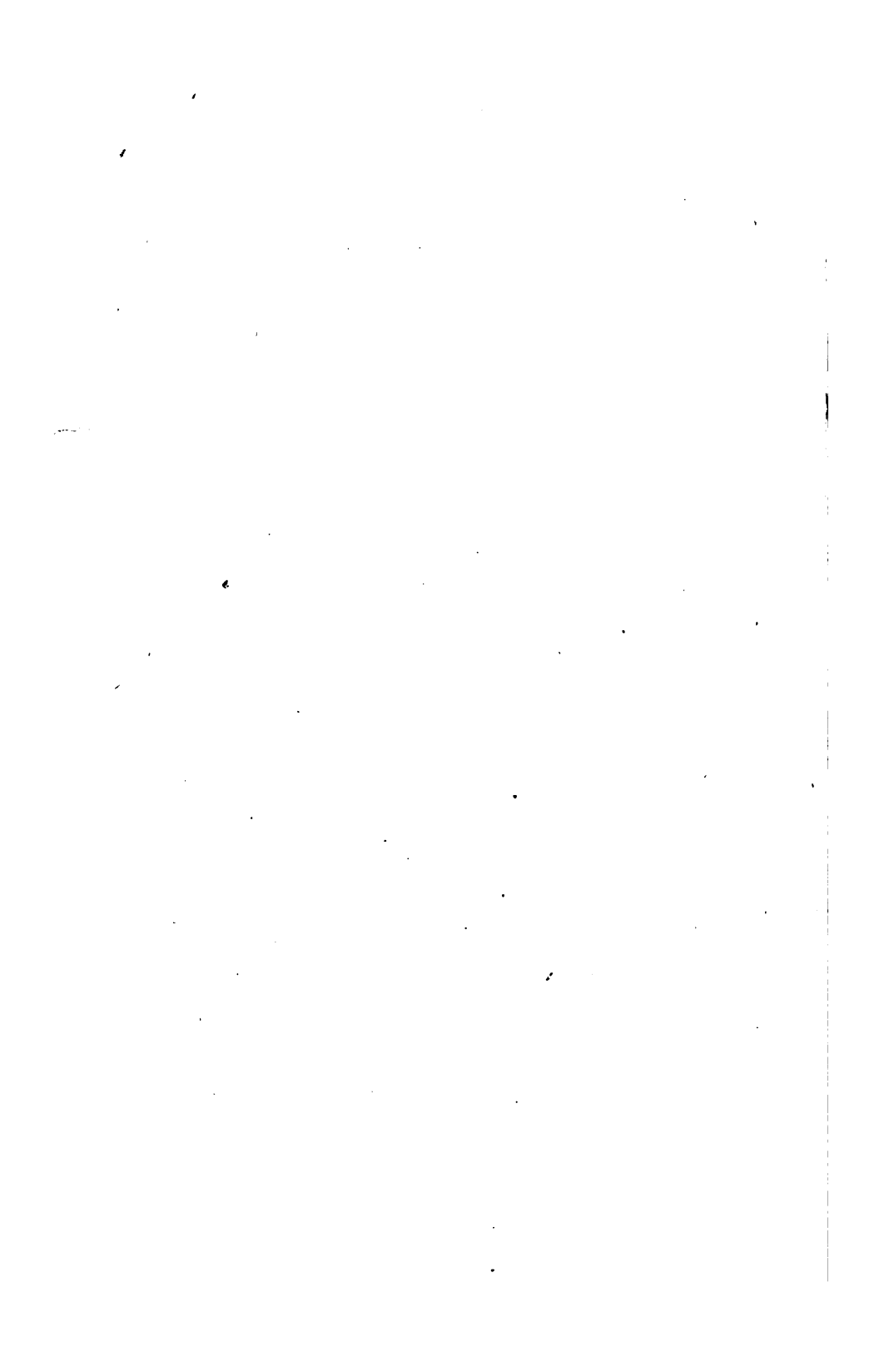
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P69

THE ASSOCIATED CHARITIES.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
BOSTON,

FEBRUARY 16, 1879.

BY

EDWARD E. HALE.

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THE ASSOCIATED CHARITIES.

Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.—I. COR. xiii., 3.

It is one of the characteristic traits of civilized men and women that people who live in cities always affect to be very fond of the country, and people who live in the country always hanker for the life of towns. There is, of course, a good deal of affectation in it. If we here really longed for orange-groves, as we pretend to, it is an easy matter to go and plant orange-trees, and we should do it. Or, if we really prized the freedom of Texas or Colorado, as we pretend, why, we should go there. Beneath the affectation, however, there is a healthy feeling, on the side of the city and country both, that each has much to learn from the other. And, as Mr. Olmsted has said, the civilization of our time requires constant effort, both "for the urbanizing of the country and the ruralizing of the cities." The introduction in the country of good roads and walks, conveniences for intercourse, ready purchase and sale, and so on, goes hand in hand with the efforts of cities to open parks, to introduce pure water, to plant living trees instead of dead ones, and to keep them alive when they have been planted. For all such work the best stimulus and guarantee is in the annual ebb and flow, which, every winter, brings into the cities the best of the inhabitants of the country, and every summer carries into the country the best of the inhabitants of the city. The results of such ebb and flow are well shown in England, where country life has more conveniences than anywhere else in the world; and where, on the other hand, even in London, though the largest of cities, the rate of health is better than it is in most even of the smaller cities of the world.

We will consider this morning the lesson which country life has to teach us who live in cities, as to mutual intercourse among people of all classes,—and the good which that inter-

course brings about in the largest undertakings of our social life. These results, as achieved in the country towns where they work at most advantage, are such as seem almost miraculous to the jaded social-science student in the city, who sees the "Black Maria" crowded every day, as she takes her sad freight to the House of Correction and the prison, and who reads, every week, of an unchecked mortality far above his desired average. The last summer when I lived in Milton, a town of between two and three thousand people, there was nobody in the poor-house. There was talk of letting rooms in it for summer boarders, the site being exquisite. In winter I think they had four old people in it, who spent their winters there as in a convenient club-house, and in the spring left to visit their friends. In the matter of health, the last report of our Registrar went into a careful argument to show the impossibility of reducing our death-rate here to 14 in the 1000, which some enthusiasts have hoped for (myself among them). But I have only to go fifteen miles, to Canton, to find a town where the death-rate is but 15 in a 1000, with good hope of improvement there. Really, our most enthusiastic plans for improvements in society, which seem in the aggregate fabulous, are little more than the bringing into one view improvements which, in separate detail, have been effected elsewhere. If, for instance, we could introduce here the social conditions of the town of Vineland, in New Jersey, under which they lived for ten years, our police expenses would be twenty-five hundred dollars a year, and our expenses for public charity for our own people "practically nothing." "Practically nothing" is the answer which the relieving officer makes in answer to a question in that direction. All the "public charity" was bestowed on tramps or other wayfarers.

The first great lesson of country life is the advantage the country towns gain because everybody knows everybody. If a man falls off his barn and is killed, and leaves a widow with six children to take care of, everybody knows it and is interested. You might say the whole town, certainly all that neighborhood, becomes a committee of the whole to attend to that woman and her family. Those children do not lack for books at school, for clothes, or for shoes. As they grow up they do not lack for work, and they do not have to carry home shavings and laths for fuel. They are taken right into the common life of the neighborhood. And, at the end of fifty years, probably any one of those children might say

that it had been no disadvantage to him, in material affairs, that his father died when he was young. Or as the children study an intelligent boy, eager in books and study, shoots right ahead of his competitors in school. That thoughtful, wise woman, who is the life of the whole village, stops him one day, and bids him come home with her and borrow some books. She makes sure she is right; she knows her boy, and knows that the Commonwealth needs all of such boys it can get. When the time comes she sends him to Harvard College yonder, and pays his bills, though to do so she have to wear the same bonnet and shawl and furs for ten years, and go to church on foot though she used to ride. I could name her name if I dared, and he who is now filling one of the first positions of trust in the Commonwealth would name it, if he were here.

Such chances and such victories are a matter of course in the country. They are not so much crowded there but they can see each others' faces. There is not so much noise but they can hear each others' voices. So they can bear each others' burdens there,—and St. Paul says this is to fulfil the whole law of Christ,—with a certain ease which is impossible here. The consequence is, that in the country towns the crime and even the grinding poverty come from those lonely hovels which are far away from the villages, in unknown "gores," as they call them, in deserts midway between one village and another. They come from these, and from the crowded factory villages, which in a horrid caricature reflect the worst evils of the life of cities. The typical life of old New England rural towns was curiously free both from pauperism and crime.

It is natural enough that people should be distressed with the bitter contrast to all this simple intercourse, which we notice in our life in cities. In your house in town you do not know the boy who brings you your eggs, nor the man who brings you your milk. You do not sit and chat with the cobbler who mends your children's shoes, and you would not know by sight the man who cut and split the wood for your fire. You hardly know what blacksmith shoes your horses, and you would laugh at me if I asked you whether his daughter were in a consumption, or whether he has not a bright boy who ought to be fitted for college. Yet in simple country life you would know all such people and all such things. And true-hearted people and right-minded people

are always watching to see how, in the vigor and vitality and high-organization of city life, they can maintain that kindness and loyalty of the life of the country, in which the workman knows his employer and his family, rejoices in their joys, and sorrows in their sorrows ; and in which, as well, the employer knows his workman, his joys, and his sorrows, bears them upon his heart, and gives his strength and sympathy. To bring into city life this sense of mutual obligation, to bring back into our society the true meaning of our good old New England word "help," so that each man shall help his brother, as Isaiah says, and every woman her sister,—this is one of the noblest efforts of our time.

The desire to do this has been the central wish of the persons most interested in the plan for associating the charities of Boston, of which you have lately seen some discussions in the journals. A public meeting was held at Chardon Street, last Monday, to carry out their plan. All of us who are interested in the relief of the poor, either personally or professionally, have to be careful that, in our blindness, we do not make paupers of them. And many of us have feared that one hundred and twenty-five different charitable societies, acting each in its own way, with little or no concert, are very apt to do a lasting injury to the manhood of those they relieve, at the very moment in which they confer a temporary solace. To establish a conference, then, between the different societies, and the different churches also, which attempt the relief of the poor, seems one direct step to a more home-like care of them, and to that improvement of the condition of each person relieved which ought to accompany each act of charity. The desire for this union was published fifty years ago by Dr. Joseph Tuckerman. "Can no plan be devised," he says, "for their closer union with each other, or by which they may know what is done by each other, or by the overseers of the poor in the wards in which they severally act?"

From that time to this, numerous efforts have been made in this direction, and with more or less success. But no effort has been made so thorough or so unanimous, or with a plan of organization which seemed so likely to succeed, as that which engages us now. A system is proposed, based upon the large experience of London and of New York, and upon plans which have been tested in detail in Buffalo and in Germantown, which looks, I do not say to a federal union of the charities,—that is too much to ask for,—but to frequent conference, and even toward what our fathers would have

called a hundred years ago a confederation. That is to say, that, under this plan, either in ward meetings or in a central meeting, the persons most interested will have an opportunity to meet each other frequently and familiarly, and avoid the dangers of isolated action.

But this association, and the registration which it provides for, are by no means the only objects of the first movers in this plan. They think they can bring about a more genuine intercourse between the rich and the poor, or, if you prefer the name, between the classes which relieve and those which are relieved, in our Boston social order. They have been doing, in one of the North-End wards, exactly what we try to do in our own church charities here. That is, they are not satisfied with sending a modicum of coal or food where it is needed. They try, as we do, to establish personal relationships of confidence and friendship between the adviser and the advised; to divide and subdivide the business of visiting the poor, so that it shall not be an irksome task, but that it can be performed as a sympathetic duty. This is the endeavor. And this relationship, as you see, is to begin again, in city life, on that friendly mutual relation so much easier in the country, in which each helps each, and all can lend a hand. Satisfied, by a trial of the hardest region in Boston, that this can be done there, they believe it can be done, in time, all over the city. And they do not conceal their wish, in calling all the societies to coöperate, that, where the business of charity-visiting has become technical and hard, or where, so far as one can find, no such visits have been made, the several societies may foster a closer and more real relationship between those who give and those who take. Especially their wish is, that the poor may never be classified as the poor, nor become a class of paupers.

The plan of associated charities, then, in proposing a systematic action of all the charitable societies, is specially urged by people who are not satisfied that one City Visitor shall be the only person to see to five hundred families. They hope to quicken all the organizations, so that each of these families may know at least one wise, sympathetic, kindly friend, who may be willing to advise, to encourage, to comfort, to render any service of friendship,—a friend who may be pledged, first of all, and that fanatically, to extricate this family from the unfortunate conditions which compelled them to seek alms.

III. So far as we can permit ourselves here to think of our own separate organization as a church, the plan of the asso-

ciated charities has no especial interest. It changes not at all the duty and the privilege which this congregation, as a church, holds towards the poverty we find. But our place as a separate church organization is but a matter of minor importance. It is to the Universal Church that we belong, the great family of God; and the value of this little family is nothing, save as it makes us better able to enjoy our joys and do our duties there. And we are glad to have any step taken forward in the gospel work, the work of human tenderness to all God's poor here, and in the business of lifting them out of their poverty.

For years upon years, in our charity work here, we have hoped and tried not to break down the self-respect of those with whom we dealt; we have tried to lift them to more useful life,—to be their real friends in placing them where they should not need our help. Under the wise and tender plans of Miss Tallant, who understood the problems of poverty so well, while she relieved its sorrows so sweetly, the arrangements made in the "South Friendly" for the sympathetic care which I have tried to describe, seem to embody all that tenderness could ask, and wisdom could plan, to unite sympathy and intelligence in the union which on Monday Mr. Brooks was pleading for so earnestly. What we of to-day have to do is, to infuse into such plans the divine spirit of love, and to carry them out with the personal eagerness which defies routine, which treats each sufferer as if his case were wholly new, and which refuses to be disconcerted by failure or by ingratitude. Of what we can do in this spirit I have tried to sketch the picture, by reminding you of those simple intimacies and perpetual kindnesses of country life.

The district assigned to our church takes in the region between the Albany Railroad and Newton Street, bounded on the west by Tremont Street. It seems that in that region there are some forty Protestant families in need of more or less outside relief through the winter months, to whom we can be of special service. Generally this is in the simple form of giving from the sewing-room down stairs a parcel of plain needle-work every week, for which the work-woman is paid the next week. Her work is superintended; and if, when the winter begins, she cannot do it well, she has a chance to learn how with those who are willing to teach. The greatest pride of the ladies charged with this work is, to have one of their work-women leave them for higher wages. With these forty families, some one or other

of us is on friendly terms. I do not think there would be sickness in one of these homes, and we here ignorant of it. I do not think a boy would be placed at his trade or a girl sent to a new school, and some of us not consulted. So far, then, we have here the entering wedge for that sort of intimacies, which I have tried to describe, in which you level up a family, though it be that of the poorest widow in Boston, and make yourself sure that you are not adding to a permanent caste or class of paupers. In such intimacies we ought not to be in the least satisfied that there is coal and oatmeal enough in store to carry a family through a week. That is the duty, and a duty, and a very noble duty, of the official alms-giver. But that duty does not satisfy the Christian friend. We want to see that the boys and girls in such families have good amusements rather than bad,—that they read good books and not vulgar and debasing ones. We should watch with them if they were sick, and provide them medicines. But we should much prefer to watch with them before they are sick, and provide preventions. If the lodgings are behind a liquor shop, and the children exposed to temptation, the girls to insult, we are glad to move them away. If the boy “gets a place,” as they say, as bar-tender, we ought to be on the look-out to put him at better work,—to have one bar-tender the less in the world, and one blacksmith, or, better, one farmer, the more. When the happy time comes when one widowed mother finds out that Meander Street or Harrison Avenue is not the best place to bring up her children, we ought to know where is the town on the hill-sides of New England, or in the midst of Western luxury, where she and they are needed. My excellent friend, Mr. Bradley, in the midst of the varied work of his Heath Street Chapel,—a church which worships in a railway station,—found time and means in two years to forward, or to help in forwarding, forty sets of emigrants, many of them with their families, from crowded Roxbury to the waiting West. Our flour and beef are the cheaper for every such migration; and for the children of these families, this means health instead of puny struggle,—real wealth instead of grinding penury,—life abundant instead of living death. It is impossible to go into much detail. But in the word friendship, rather than condescension, the whole is implied. The object is not feeding the poor,—it is their elevation from poverty. I can well understand that you might do a boy more good by giving him a concert ticket than by giving him a jacket. The gift of the

jacket might make a pirate of him,—he might never earn another jacket. The gift of the concert ticket might quicken the best tastes God had given him,—might determine him to tread under foot temptations which surrounded him,—might give him the feeling of companionship with those he knew were his superiors, and determine him that he also would give such pleasures some day to others. Open to boy or girl, in an evening spent with them, the art of reading. I mean, show them how to use and how to choose among books which you now lay so lavishly before them. In that evening, it may be that you have saved boy or girl from temptations thrust before them at every corner,—that you have opened up a vista which leads even to infinite life. Mrs. Farnham, one of the John Howards of our times, whose work in prisons and for prisoners has blessed Europe and America, used to say that she was started from the dead inaction of the poorest wilderness life, when a kind traveller gave her a copy of De Witt Clinton's speeches. I can well believe it, because he was a *kind* traveller, and meant well to the lonely girl he found starving for something more than she found in carding wool, in spinning flax, or in feeding hens.

Every boy who is trained to depend on begging from door to door is one more pirate thrown into the community, to be watched and caught and imprisoned and discharged, and watched and caught again, and imprisoned and discharged again, in one long dreary series of wretchedness, till it pleases God to release him from a world which has been too much for him, and to try him in another. Every boy, on the other hand, whom you lift from that grade of beggary, who comes to respect himself and to determine to rise in honor as in work, is a child of God, to whom you have revealed himself. He is so much gain to the Commonwealth and to God's service in the world. Nor is this slight service. He deserves well of God and man who makes two blades of grass grow where one grew before. Of how much higher desert is he or she who, from a wilderness hopeless and dead, rescues these little ones, who to the next generation are to be men and women, pure, godly, brave, and true! And there is not one of us who may not enlist in such service. I heard it said, the other day, that the tender care of the poor of Boston, such as I have described, would require two thousand Florence Nightingales. That is quite true. What shame to Boston,—what shame to the religion which builds these churches, which paints their walls with saints, which bids those walls echo

with harmonies of song or of prayer,—if we have not two thousand, and ten times two thousand, women here fit to do all that St. Florence herself could do, in this work of lifting up those that are fallen down. Simply to take one widow poorer than yourself into the sympathy of friendship, simply to make one half-starved drunkard's wife sure of one loyal friend, simply to carry into a tenement lodging-house the neatness and order and discipline which to your own home give that sacred name of home, simply in one such home to do unto others what you would have others do unto you! No, there is no lack of women for such enterprises, thoughtful and unselfish, nor of men, prompt, considerate, and brave.

And I will not for an instant speak as if only the poor, as we call them, received the blessing, and the rich, as we call them, gave it. If it were only a five-dollar bill which you put into the offertory or the charity-box, forgotten in the hour, the mere tribute of accidental good-nature, that might be so. But when you give yourself, when you think out this problem of perplexity, when you sacrifice your own comfortable evening to making yonder home less dreary, when, by your teaching, that boy becomes less stupid and more able to bear his burdens, then you begin to find what the Master meant, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain more power for mercy." Live outside yourself, and you begin to find what life, unbounded and abundant, is. We need not plead, indeed, so much for those poor who are not here. For ourselves when we are mean or selfish, for ourselves when we have nothing we are willing to give away, for ourselves when we think our comfort is the first object in the universe, we may well plead at the throne of grace. That God will open our eyes! That God will kindle our hearts! That he will teach us to bear each others' burdens! For we also are the poorest of the poor, if we do not learn to pour forth, and that boldly, from that which has been given to our keeping. "Let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Thus shall we know what it is to be sons and daughters of God.

To return to that comparison of the openness of country life, and the close imprisonment of cities, let me read Cowper's bitter lines, not yet a hundred years old. I think they are the only verses in which he alludes to the dismemberment of the British Empire, in which America was lost to the English crown. It is worth notice that he ascribes the

folly of the administration of the time — and he was right —
to the folly and selfishness of London : —

She has her praise. Now mark a spot or two
That so much beauty would do well to purge,
And show this queen of cities that so fair
May yet be foul; so witty, yet not wise.
It is not seemly nor of good report
That she is slack in discipline; more prompt
To avenge than to prevent the breach of law.
That she is rigid in denouncing death
On petty robbers, and indulges life,
And liberty, and oftentimes honors, too,
To peculators of the public gold! . . .
Advancing Fashion to the post of Truth,
And centering all authority in modes
And customs of her own, till Sabbath rites
Have dwindled into unrespected forms,
And knees and hassocks are well-nigh divorced.

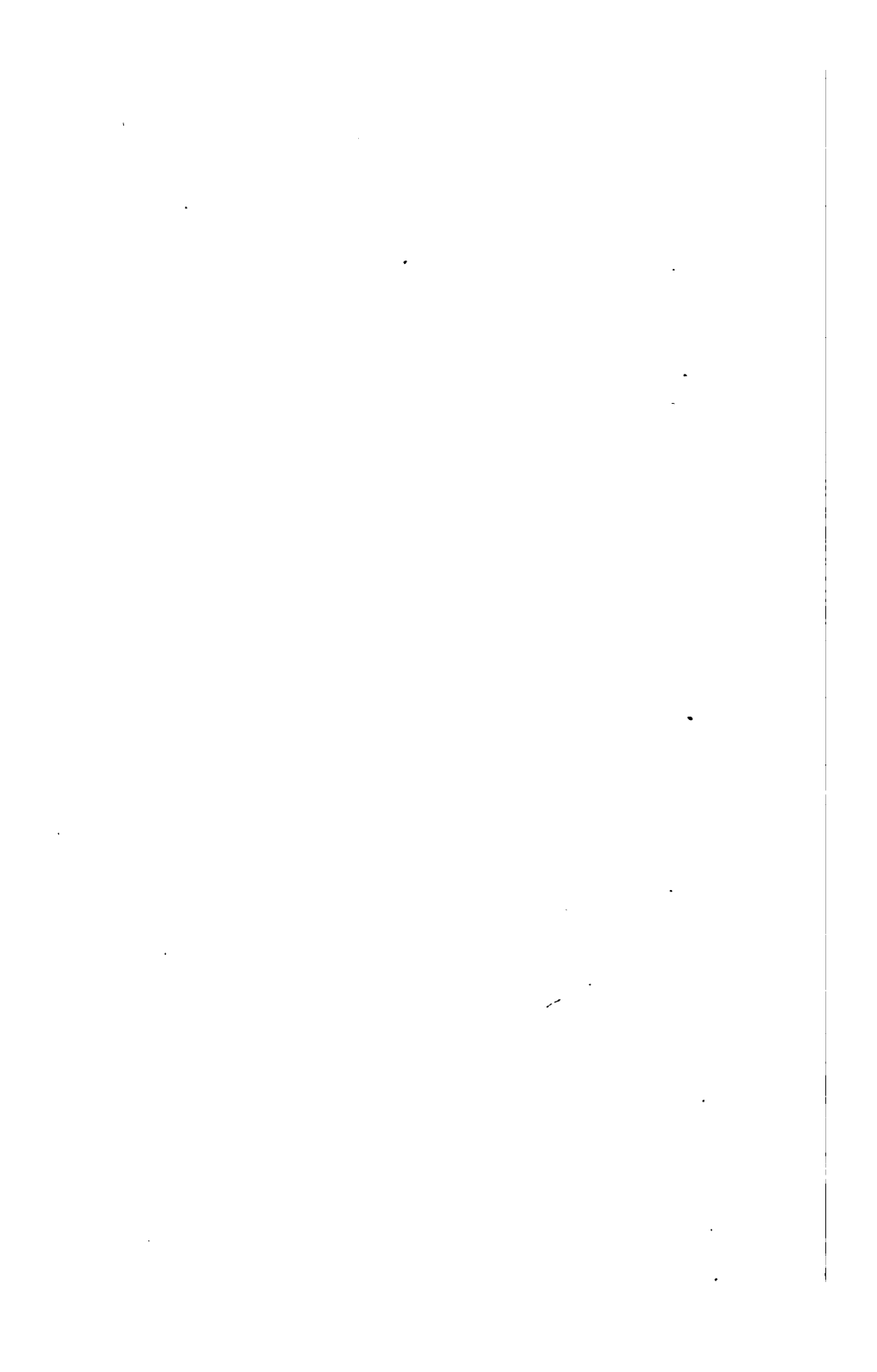
God made the country, and man made the town;
What wonder, then, that health . . .
 . . . should most abound
And least be threatened in the fields and groves?
 . . . We [here] can spare
The splendor of your lamps. . . .
 . . . Your songs confound
Our more harmonious notes. The thrush departs,
Scared, and the offended nightingale is mute.
There is a public mischief in your mirth, —
It plagues your country. Folly such as yours,
Graced with a sword, and worthier of a fan,
Has made — what enemies could ne'er have done —
Our arch of Empire, steadfast but for you,
A mutilated structure, soon to fall.

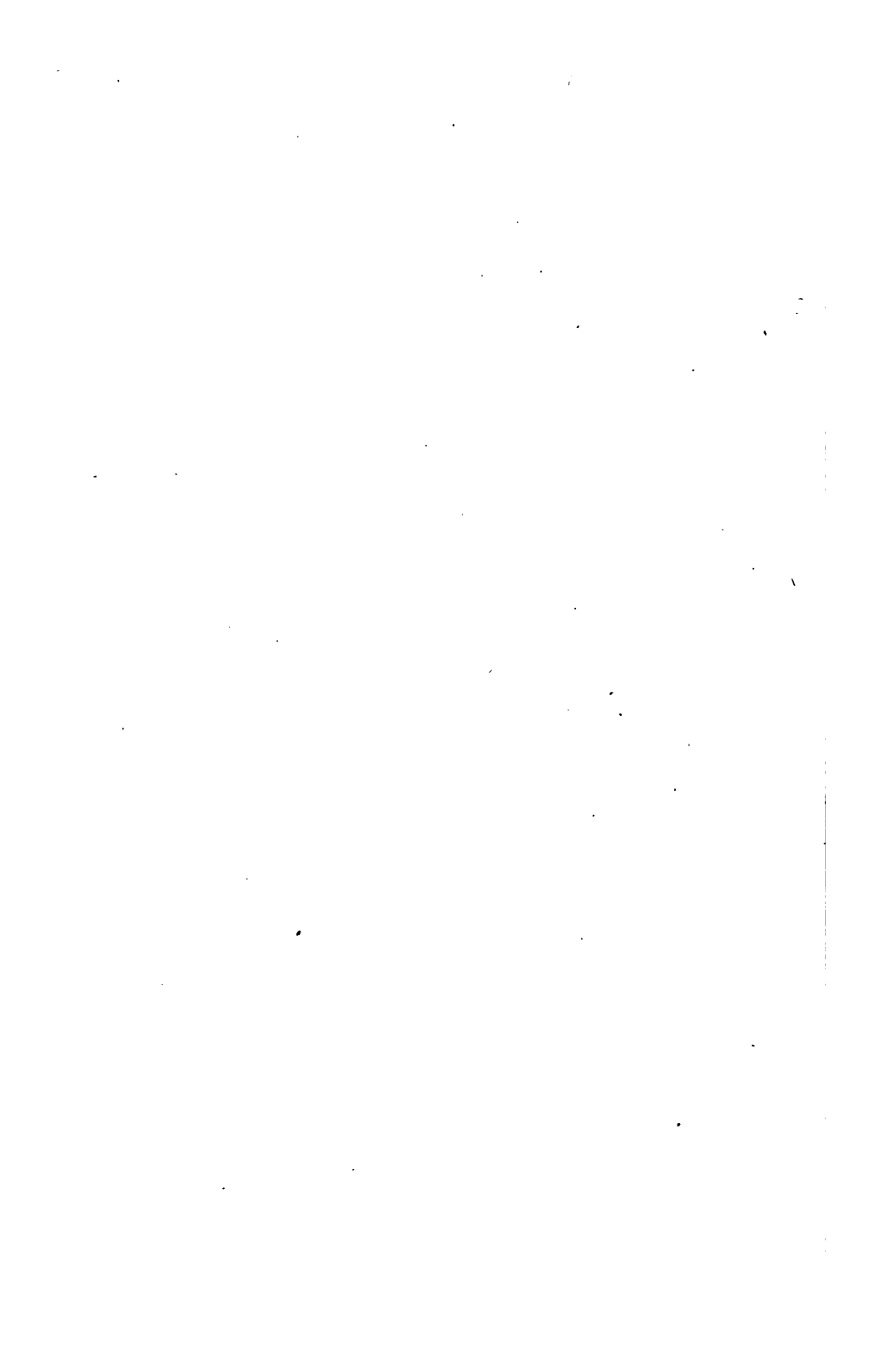
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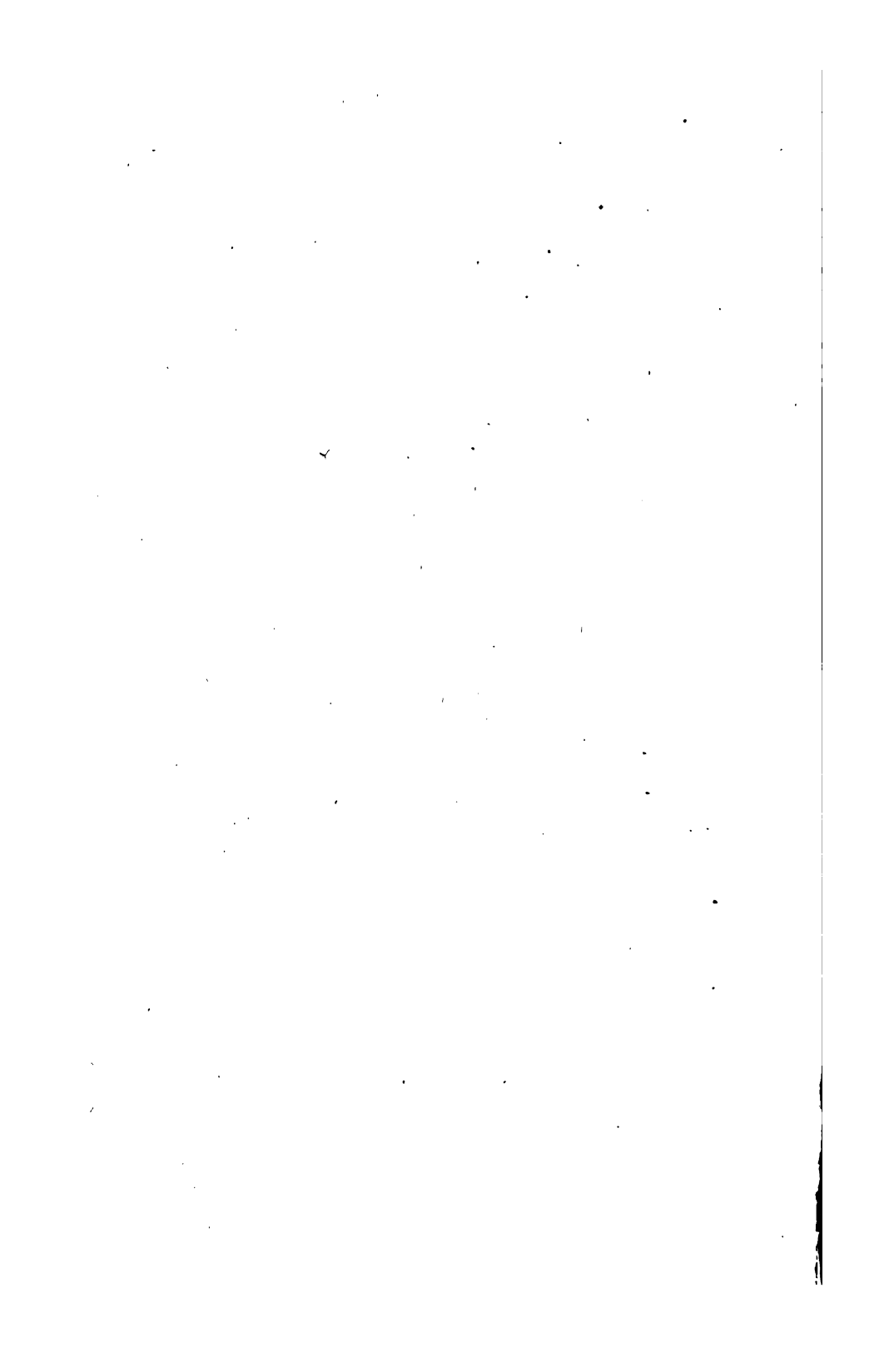
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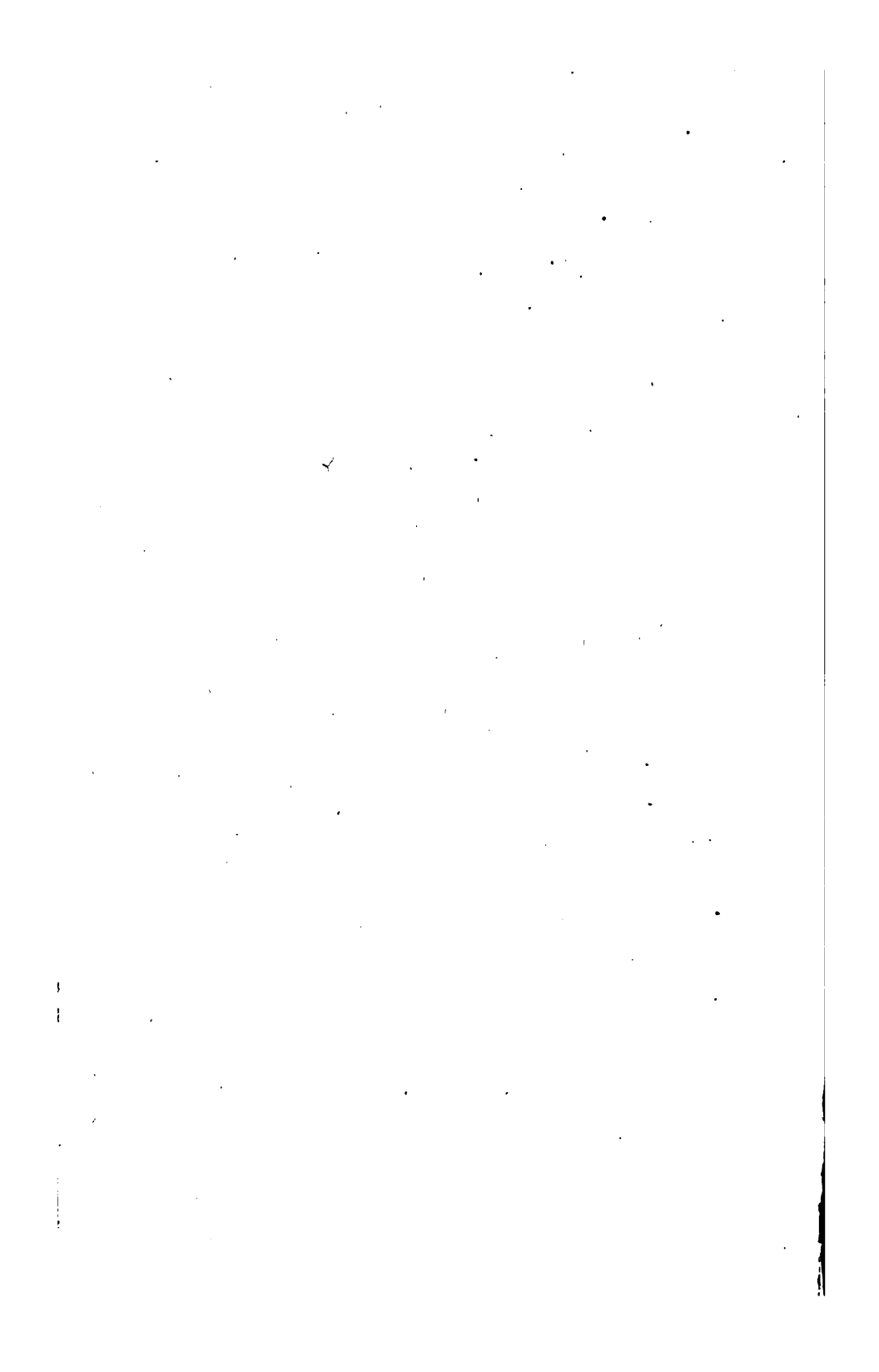






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